



# The Keene Sentinel

New Hampshire's Oldest Newspaper ... *Guarding the Past, Tending Tomorrow*

Established 1799

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Monday, January 8, 2001

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## N.H. infant death trend stuns state officials

By Associated Press

ROCHESTER — The former Keene man accused in the beating death of a 21-month-old girl told police he didn't kill the girl, though he admits he played "rough" with her to "toughen her up," court documents say.

Kassidy Bortner of Rochester died Nov. 9. Her mother's boyfriend, Chad Evans, 29, once a member of the Keene Board of Education, is charged with second-degree murder and eight assault

charges.

Court records allege Evans had beaten Kassidy repeatedly for three months, threw her against walls, and broke her leg and arm in separate incidents last summer and fall.

Maine authorities have worked with N.H. police in investigating the case because Kassidy's aunt in Kittery, Maine, was baby-sitting her the day she died.

New Hampshire's chief medical examiner says he is stunned by

the number of young children killed in the state last year.

Dr. Thomas Andrew, New Hampshire's chief medical examiner, said that, in a typical year, New Hampshire averages one or two homicides of children younger than age 4. But last year, four babies were killed in New Hampshire, said Assistant N.H. Attorney General Kelly Ayotte, and the deaths of three others are being investigated.

"What we saw in 2000 is clearly

extremely alarming," Andrew said. "Not only was the number of child deaths high, but these were very young children.

"Talk about the slaughter of the innocent. This is cause for great alarm."

Andrew said that, with numbers so small, it's hard to call the deaths a trend — though he is surprised to see so many deaths when the economy is strong, which usually lowers the pressures that tend to increase the homicide rate.

"I'm hoping this is a freakish year," he said. "If this is what happens to kids in economic good times, what happens in recession years?"

In the Bortner case, court documents unsealed on a motion by The Keene Sentinel alleged that Kassidy's mother, Amanda Bortner, 18, and her sister, Jennifer Conley, who baby-sat the girl, knew she was being abused months before she died, and that they protected the abuser.

Amanda Bortner told police she knew Evans beat the child several times, the court records state, and Conley told police that she'd seen bruises on the toddler's face during the two months Bortner lived with Evans, and that the child had become fearful and withdrawn.

"(Amanda) Bortner said that Evans had abused Kassidy for approximately four-six weeks," according to court records.

(See N.H. INFANT / Page 4)



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(Continued from Page One)

"Specifically, she cited incidents where Evans grabbed Cassidy's face in palming fashion and threw her into corner in the home hard enough for Cassidy to strike her head on the floor and-or wall.

"On two occasions, Evans choked Cassidy until she gagged to stop Cassidy from crying. Also, once when he was angry, Evans picked Cassidy up by her head," the affidavit states.

Evans told police a different story, appearing to blame Conley's live-in boyfriend, F. Jeffrey Marshall.

"He stated that he picked Cassidy up at Marshall's house on Nov. 8 and Cassidy was acting funny. Cassidy was quieter than normal. She was leaning forward in the seat in the car and drooling," Evans told police.

Evans then said he called Marshall to ask whether he had beaten Cassidy, the affidavit states.

"Evans called Marshall and told Marshall that the retard, referring to Cassidy, is acting weird in the back seat. He also told Marshall that Cassidy's head was bobbing around," according to court records.

Evans also told police that he was alone with Cassidy only a few times and that "Marshall admitted that Marshall hit Cassidy so hard that his hand stung and Cassidy was black and blue."

The Maine chief medical examiner's office has not yet released the results of the child's autopsy. Authorities have said it may be months before they are released.

Nancy Rollins, director of the N.H. Division for Children, Youth and Families, said the case re-emphasizes the need to look at what's being done to protect children, and what else is needed, particularly to deal with "the more vulnerable parents."

A state New Hampshire's size, with 1.2 million residents, gener-

ally shouldn't have more than one or two homicides of young children a year, said Murray Straus, one of the directors of the Family Research Laboratory at the University of New Hampshire.

But, "with rare events, there

are a lot of year-to-year random fluctuations, so you can't talk about what is usual," he said.

**FRAMES**

